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AUTHOR Enz, Billie J.; Searfoss, Lyndon W.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined teachers' and parents' attitudes toward teacher evaluation, particularly in regard to the usefulness of instruction-based instruments to measure holistic, integrated classroom practices. A pilot teacher assessment instrument was developed and field-tested at seven schools in which holistic methods were practiced. Interviews were also conducted with 10 elementary school principals and 9 teachers who had established holistic, integrated practices. Findings indicate that although the principals endorsed holistic, integrated practices, they were reluctant to alter the status quo of using a direct instruction-based evaluation instrument. Teachers who were evaluated by principals unfamiliar with holistic instruction expressed frustration and disappointment, viewing their principals' observations as missed opportunities for both teachers and administrators. A conclusion is that the teacher-evaluation instrument is much less important than the processes of negotiation and collaboration between teachers and administrators. The teacher evaluation instrument should be collaboratively developed; negotiated by participants for agreement of form and content; controlled by participants for shared decision making in how the instrument is used; able to assess the complexities of holistic, integrated classrooms; learning-centered; revised as participants change and grow; and used to foster collegial interchanges. (LMI)

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WHO EVALUATES TEACHER PERFORMANCE?

MISMATCHED PARADIGMS, THE STATUS QUO, AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Billie J. Enz and Lyndon W. Searfoss
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona 85287-0311
602-965-7766
FAX 602-965-1090

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Billie J. Enz and Lyndon W. Searfoss
Arizona State University

Who Evaluates Teacher Performance? Mismatched Paradigms, the Status Quo, and Missed Opportunities

Throughout the United States, profound philosophical and political changes are taking place in classrooms. Teachers are evolving child-centered, holistic, integrated practices which are in direct contrast to the traditional, teacher-centered, direct instructional model which has dominated both instructional methodology and teacher evaluation systems for the last 15 years.

As teachers are observed and evaluated in classrooms where holistic, integrated instruction approaches are ongoing, it becomes apparent that current teacher evaluation instruments are not adequate to assess the practices in these classrooms. The very real mismatch between the underlying tenets of holistic, integrated practice and the direct instruction approach is glaring. Integrated, holistic practice and the direct instruction model simply are not compatible (Smith 1990), and evaluating teacher performance in integrated, holistic classrooms using instruments developed for a direct instructional model is indefensible.

Traditionally, teacher evaluation has served unequal purposes. To a large extent, it is used to determine a teacher's suitability for continued employment or financial reward. To a much lesser extent, evaluation has been used to provide teachers an opportunity to receive feedback about their teaching, stimulate reflective thought, and facilitate professional growth. Yet, how can holistic practitioners be evaluated fairly or receive meaningful feedback if they are evaluated by a system and instrumentation which are, at best, inappropriate?

Currently, the vast majority of teacher evaluation systems are based on a direct instruction model, such as Madeline Hunter's Essential Elements of Instruction or EEI (Hunter 1982). In fact, in a survey of 34 school districts located in the metropolitan area in which our university resides, we found that 98% of the teacher performance evaluation systems used were based on the EEI Hunter model (Enz & Searfoss 1991).

As Smith (1990) noted:

> A myriad of local school districts, intermediate instructional agencies, and even large portions of some state educational systems have chosen to adopt the Hunter model as their focus for their instructional methodology, curriculum development, and even teacher assessment. (p. 12)

The focus of this three-year project was to understand:

* possible conflicts of evaluating holistic, integrated practice with direct instruction instrumentation,
* principals' perceptions and concerns of assessing holistic practitioners,
* teachers' views of the evaluation process, and
* the role of teacher evaluation in holistic, integrated instruction.

Method/Overview

To begin, we looked to the wisdom of experts and conducted an extensive review of the literature concerning teacher evaluation, peer coaching, holistic philosophy, and assessment. To understand the wisdom of practice, and to determine the process, purpose, and perceptions of evaluation in holistic, integrated classrooms, we sought the perspective and experiences of ten principals who had evaluated holistic practices, and nine holistic teachers who were striving to implement an integrated, holistic philosophy. Intensive, structured interviews with open-ended probes were employed to establish common issues and discrepancies. Content analysis of the interviews and a literature review of teacher evaluation systems and instruments led to the development of a pilot instrument.

Next, the pilot instrument was field-tested at seven school sites where holistic practices existed and where the principal was willing to work with us. During the pilot stage we were concerned with reliability and validity issues, but also with practical problems, such as who evaluates, when, how much time and agreement of vocabulary, definitions, and the format of the document.
We have collaborated with approximately 50 teacher and student teacher teams through a workshop entitled "Assessment and Supervision of Holistic Practices." By using the instrument as a vehicle, the process and purposes of evaluation are being examined by holistic teachers (pre-service and in-service) and their principals.

What follows is an account of how we discovered that teacher assessment was the tip of a much larger iceberg and a vehicle by which teachers and principals, through negotiation and collaboration, could address the larger issue of their own professional growth and development. How they communicated that message to us proved as significant as our goal of improving the validity of teacher assessment instruments.

Our work began with many questions: What is the role of a teacher evaluation system in holistic, integrated instruction? As teachers strive to move toward this type of instruction, how can they (or can they) be evaluated fairly for their efforts? Can

principals and other administrators familiar with instruments based on direct instruction practices use an instrument based on holistic, integrated beliefs?

Results

Principals' Views: Evaluation and the Status Quo

In an attempt to discover the views of one of the major participants in teacher evaluation, our initial study in 1988 included interviews with ten elementary school principals. The principals selected had experience in evaluating holistic, integrated practices. In some schools, entire faculties had made a commitment to holistic, integrated instruction, while other schools were a mixture of classrooms using direct instruction and holistic, integrated practices.

As we analyzed the interview responses of the principals, two major patterns emerged. First, almost all of the principals felt the direct instruction-based teacher evaluation instruments accurately identified effective, competent teachers in their buildings; and, second, these same instruments documented only narrow, surface aspects of teaching. The principals reported the instruments they were using as "inadequate and limited" in their ability to capture the intricate interactions between teacher, students, and the learning environment in holistic, integrated classrooms. The direct-instruction instruments also did not reveal the complex nature of teaching thinking, and how decisions were often based on years of prior experiences and observations.

After discussing the interviews with principals, we then asked them to imagine how they might augment or replace the present direct-instruction evaluation instrument to improve the assessment of holistic, integrated classrooms. To our surprise and amazement, they expressed great reluctance to alter the status quo, even after endorsing holistic, integrated practices and giving much praise to the teachers they had observed in these classrooms. Their "what for" attitude was summarized by one principal in this way:

> Even though it doesn't show what they (holistic, integrated language teachers) do, because they already top out on the instrument, and since it doesn't affect their district status (merit pay, in this case), why change it?

What began as an effort to develop an alternative teacher evaluation instrument soon became frustrating, however, when our first reactions from principals implied that it did not really matter what instrument they used. Effective teachers, they told us, would always "score high" or "top out" on any instrument they were required to use, regardless of whether it was based on EEI,

direct instruction practices, or holistic, integrated instruction practices. Our initial questions seemed suddenly hollow. Were we trying to build a better mousetrap when there was no perceived threat of mice?

Whether the principals we interviewed were typical or not, we cannot say; what we can say is that even caring, interested, and supportive principals may not endorse changing teacher evaluation away from a direct instruction-based instrument.

Teachers' Views: Missed Opportunities

To discern the perspective of teachers, we conducted several intensive interviews of nine teachers who had established holistic, integrated practices. Since the teacher evaluation instruments in the seven districts they represented were built on EEI components, these teachers also had received extensive in-service on Hunter's EEI strategies (Hunter 1982). Four of the teachers reported their principals as having "strong theoretical and practical understanding" of holistic, integrated classroom practices. The remaining teachers interviewed felt their principals were naive to holistic, integrated practices and that the attitudes of these principals ranged from mildly disinterested to actively unsupportive. It was the consensus of these veteran teachers (who ranged in teaching experience from 6 to 20 years) that the direct instruction assessment instruments endorsed by their school districts and used by their principals were not valid.

The teachers who were evaluated by naive principals reported to us that they often constructed a direct instruction lesson for their principals rather than try to explain or defend their holistic, integrated beliefs. These same teachers expressed both anger and disappointment that the "quality of discovery learning and student interactions were discounted" in their classrooms. In addition, they reported feeling unappreciated and unrecognized as professionals, even though they knew they were doing the very best for their students and would probably be rated as "good" teachers by their principals. They viewed their principals' observations of their teaching as more "missed opportunities" for both administrators and teachers. Principals missed an opportunity to discover how learning in holistic, integrated classrooms was accomplished, and how teachers and students developed a classroom community of learners.

These same teachers also felt frustration as they missed opportunities for feedback and collegial discussions about their beliefs and practices in their classrooms. This sense of frustration further contributed to feelings of isolation from the principal-as-evaluator and other teachers who were not trying to use holistic, integrated practices in their classrooms. The interviews with teachers who had uninitiated principals revealed a strong need to receive recognition for and feedback about their

evolving teaching practices, their own growth as teachers, and their students. Further, they wanted to have "dialogues with others, learn more about my craft, share what I've learned, both the frustrations and the joys," as one teacher so powerfully expressed.

Implications

Teacher Evaluation: Why Bother?

After interviewing principals and teachers in our search for the wisdom of practice, analyzing their responses, and doing considerable reading in the professional literature, we went back to our original questions and tried to answer them. As we began to construct at least partial answers to our questions, we were haunted by the comments of the principals and especially of the teachers we interviewed. A new question emerged: "Why bother to evaluate teacher performance at all if it only perpetuates the status quo (principals' views) and causes nothing but frustration over missed opportunities (teachers' views)?

We found our answer in the strong desire the teachers expressed to talk about their practices, their own growth as teachers, and the ways in which they were trying to change instruction in their classrooms. As one teacher expressed, "This is beyond evaluation, this is my professional growth." This, we believe, is the most powerful argument for evaluating teacher performance.

In reviewing recent research on supervision (Glickman 1992), it becomes evident that evaluation for professional growth has never been or should ever be the sole domain of the principal. To promote professional development, teachers must be empowered to become an integral part of the assessment process within their schools. If teachers and administrators work together to craft and tailor an instrument that reflects their beliefs and practices, the opportunity for self-reflection and professional growth become realities. When teachers assume a major role in the evaluation process, from development through implementation, a teacher evaluation instrument based on holistic, integrated practices will tap the rich and complex environment in classrooms. It was also clear to us that the ultimate product, an instrument, was much less important than the processes of negotiation and collaboration by which it evolved. Thus, the instrument would be:

> developed collaboratively by teachers and evaluators
> negotiated by participants for agreement of form and content
> controlled by participants for shared decision-making in how the instrument is used

> sophisticated enough to assess the complex environment, practices, and interactions in holistic, integrated classrooms.
> centered around the activities and learning of students, teachers, and the classroom environment
> revised as participants change and grow
> used to ameliorate the feelings of isolation often felt by teachers through fostering collegial interchanges.

This process/instrument would document the activities in holistic and integrated classrooms, describe and guide instruction, and enhance the professional and personal growth of teachers. It would allow for reflection and " . . Build shared referents for a shared language of teaching. . . adequate to the complexity of teaching." (Little 1981, p. 12)

We saw that by solving this one problem, our teachers and principals were telling us far more. They were showing us how to create a new school environment with new roles for both of them -- a new environment that shared control and power in ways that would alter profoundly their professional roles and responsibilities.

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